



HOPES GROW FOR KINGLY SAXON MUSEUM

At the end of last year, archaeologists, working near the vacation resort of Southend-on-Sea in Essex, made the most astounding archaeological discovery of the last sixty years. Exploring the possible site of a Saxon cemetery in advance of a road-widening scheme, they uncovered the wooden burial chamber of a man who, by the belongings buried with him, can only be described as a King! As preservation progresses, hopes are now growing for the building of a brand new museum at Southend, with a full-scale replica of the Royal Burial.

Discovered in the suburb of Prittlewell, the dead-man – now generally known as the ‘Prittlewell Prince’ – had been buried at the beginning of the 7th century in the middle of a large wooden burial chamber, on the walls and floor of which were placed items both for his use after death and to display his importance in life. As the roof of the chamber had collapsed under the weight of the mound raised above it, the surrounding sand had flowed into the room and miraculously preserved the wall-hung items in their original positions, complete with suspension pegs. The man’s sword, shield and spears show that he was, at least, of warrior status. Many items, such as drinking vessels, casks and even a musical lyre, relate to feasting; and the man had enough leisure time to indulge in playing board games. Several of the items came from North Africa and only a man of the highest rank could have afforded to trade over such great distances. A folding stool, from Italy or Hungary, could even have been a type of throne.



The only burial truly comparable to this find, is the great ‘Ship Burial’ discovered at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk in 1939, and thought to be a memorial to King Redwald of East Anglia. The dazzling array of treasures buried there now form one of the most important collections of the British Museum. Like the body at Sutton Hoo, the undisturbed Prittlewell Prince had completely dissolved in the acidic soil. However, unlike the ship burial, the archaeologists were able to excavate his tomb to the highest of modern scientific standards.

Clues to the man’s identity lie in the several items symbolic of Christianity, some of which were directly associated with the now missing body. He wore a golden belt buckle which was probably used as a personal reliquary for holding a small holy relic, and two gold foil crosses were placed on his chest. In a decayed silver box nearby was a silver spoon possibly engraved with a cross. The date of the burial, along with these signs that this was a very important Christian, suggests that the most likely candidate is Saebert, the King of the East Saxons, who was persuaded by St. Mellitus to introduce the faith to his kingdom in 600. His successors reverted to paganism and thus buried him in their own tradition, though his Christian possessions survived, with Mellitus perhaps adding the crosses. He was expelled from the kingdom soon afterward.

Southend Borough Council has always stated that they are fully committed to the long term conservation and display of the tomb contents, but they have yet to confirm any solid decisions. However, they have recently hinted that they would like to see a new museum, possibly at Southend Cliffs, in which this new discovery would form the centrepiece. Plans would include a reconstructed tomb, with the original objects displayed in surrounding cases. Exactly what form this display would take has yet to be decided, but, as is appropriate for such an amazing discovery, it will certainly be spectacular, including high-tech interactive aspects and interpretative media to enrich the visitor’s experience.

Read more about [St. Mellitus](#) and [King Redwald](#) and examine our list of [Saxon Kings of Essex](#) on BHC Online.

FOLLOWING IN AUGUSTINE'S FOOTSTEPS

An unexpected sunny day, at the end of the Fall, gave me perhaps my last chance this year for an historical day out. So I headed for Canterbury.



With so much to see, I decided to stick to the places which made it famous as the centre of the Church in England. This largely came about by accident. When St. Augustine was sent, in AD 597, to aid Queen Bertha of Kent in converting her husband, King Aethelbert, from paganism, he had always planned to move on to London. But circumstances dictated that he stay in Kent.

I started by visiting St. Martin's Church. Queen Bertha, a Christian princess from France, had been given a small brick Roman mausoleum here (thought to be an old church) in which to worship, long before Augustine's arrival. Much of the original structure survives in the present building and, whatever your beliefs, it has a strangely calm and spiritual feeling about the place.

Not far away are the ruins of St. Augustine's Abbey the holy man's first monastery. It is remarkable for the remains of the great Saxon rotunda which would have rivalled the most elaborate of Continental churches. The old Saxon arrangement of having several churches in a row is also clearly visible. However, the marked graves of the many saintly Saxon archbishops must have made the place a very crowded pilgrimage centre. There are currently plans to erect two bronze statues of Aethelbert and Bertha on a green nearby.

My last stop was the magnificent cathedral itself, beneath which Augustine's cathedral has only recently been excavated. There are not enough superlatives to describe this place, but I would urge visitors not to miss the incredibly ancient stained glass, the Royal tombs and the site of St. Thomas' Shrine. Such medieval attractions have almost obliterated any sign of St. Augustine.

I found each place special in its own way, but while Canterbury is the 'Cradle of English Christianity'. I can never forget that Welsh Christianity is much older and that Augustine was very rude and arrogant towards his fellow bishops who had been administering to the people of Britain long before his arrival.

See [St. Augustine](#), [St. Aethelbert](#), [St. Bertha](#) & the [Magical History Tour](#) on BHC Online.

BRITISH HISTORY CLUB UPDATE



This month, the big news is that we are just a few days away from the launch of our own domain, www.BritishHistoryClub.com! This will be BHC's new, permanent home and site of all future content development. Britannia.com has been kind enough to provide previous hosting for us and now we're ready to go it alone. Expected launch is **December 31**. All usernames and passwords will still be valid, so little will change -- except for a great, new look, new content and new community features. Here's what you'll find:

New Look

Most gateway/index pages will be wider - 900 pixels - for a more open look and more room for explanation and graphics. Some content pages will also use this to accommodate a great, new feature:

Knowledge Navigator

This is a hi-convenience feature that puts a mass of useful information right where you need it, when you need it! Need to know the difference between a Duke and a Baron? No problem, the Knowledge Navigator can take you to the answer in a few seconds. You can keep the Navigator in a handy window, so that whenever you read an article, you can check a timeline or a listing of monarchs or whatever you need to know.

Speaking of Monarchs...

Ever wondered what Henry IV looked like? Well, now you can know for sure. We've put together over 250 images of monarchs from William I to Elizabeth II, with a few earlier ones too and many queens. You'll see stained glass, statues, lithographs, paintings, drawings & more.

Member Forum

Speak up, we want to hear from YOU! The new forum is online and ready for you to express your opinion on that latest book, take part in a discussion or just ask a question. Get to know what's on other members' minds. This just may become the most active part of the site.

Remember, it all goes online in just a few days, on 31 December.

JANE EYRE'S SECRET STAIRS



A hidden staircase matching that described by Charlotte Brontë in her early 19th century masterpiece, 'Jane Eyre,' has been discovered in the house which has always been said to have inspired much of the story. Norton Conyers, a modest Tudor mansion, is located near Ripon in Yorkshire, not far from Ripley where Brontë acted as governess to the Sidgwick family's "riotous, perverse unmanageable" children. Her novel's titular character similarly becomes a governess to Mr. Rochester's children at 'Thornfield Hall'. They soon plan to wed but, unknown to poor Jane, Rochester is still married and keeps his mad wife locked up in the attic at the top of a secret staircase!

Because of the book's descriptions of a rookery, a sunk fence and a wide oak staircase, Norton Conyers has always remained the front runner for a real life 'Thornfield' and a small room in the attic is traditionally known as the 'Mad Woman's Room'. However, the final proof has only now been revealed after owner, Sir James Graham, began investigating late Victorian panelling installed in the 'Peacock Room', located in a similar position to Mr. Rochester's bedroom in the novel. Tapping produced a hollow sound, so Sir James moved to the attic above where he lifted a number of floorboards and exposed a very narrow flight of thirteen steps descending into the cavity behind the panelling. The door at the bottom had a spring to always ensure its closure, so the short-cut to the mad woman's abode would never be discovered.

The Grahams have lived at Norton since 1624 and the deranged lady has her origins in an old family story, although no-one has yet been able to locate her on the family tree. It has been suggested that she was locked away because she was an epileptic or an unmarried mother. According to Brontë's great friend, Ellen Nussey, the authoress heard the tale when she visited the house in 1839, probably accompanying her employers, the Sidgwicks. This was some time before the installation of the panelling.

Norton Conyers has many grand rooms which are open to the public every Summer, but Sir James now hopes to include the more unassuming secret stairs and their attic room which so many people have read about in 'Jane Eyre'. "It is a sad room with a tragic feel about it, and very awkward to reach," said Lady Graham, "No-one ever wants to stay there. It's too creepy."

CONAN DOYLE EXHIBITION OF UNSEEN PAPERS

The manuscript of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's first novel, 'The Narrative of John Smith' goes on display for the first time at the British Library. It is the centrepiece of an exhibition of a selection of over 2,000 of the great writer's letters, diaries, photographs and other papers given to and purchased by the Library last year. It seems, however, that Doyle may not have approved. In 1897, the novel was lost in the post and the author wrote, "my shock at its disappearance would be as nothing to my horror if it were suddenly to appear again."! The exhibition runs from 2nd December to 30th January.

WILL THE PUBLIC RETAIN ACCESS TO BIBURY COURT?

After over thirty-five years as a family-run hotel, Bibury Court in Gloucestershire is up for sale. However, because of the excellent condition of the property, the vendors consider it ideal for reconversion back to a private home and future generations of tourists may miss out on an opportunity to stay in the place that William Morris dubbed, "the prettiest village in England". Although remodelled internally, the exterior of the Court has remained largely unchanged since being built in 1633. Offers are invited in the region of £4m.

Read More about [Bibury Court](#) on BHC Online.

CHURCH OF THE MONTH

As well as being an active place of worship, the parish church reflects the history of every village in Britain. This month, we take a look at:

KEMPLEY CHURCH



Kempley is a tiny little parish church, hidden away off the beaten track on the Gloucestershire-Herefordshire border. It is almost entirely of 12th C. construction and, remarkably, this includes the roof. The tower was added in the following century and constructed quickly with no foundations or external door. This suggests it was used as a place of refuge from the raiding Welsh.

Ancient and charming as the building is, there is only really one reason for visiting Kempley Church: to see its magnificent medieval wall paintings.

Whitewashed at the Reformation, these Nationally important works of art remained hidden until 1872. The 14th C. decor in the nave greets you upon entry: some interesting characters on the window splays and a huge 'Wheel of Life'. However, you are immediately drawn to the chancel where the complete and original scheme of 1120 covers all the walls, as well as the barrel vaulted ceiling. The 12 apostles under arches flank Christ in Majesty surrounded by the faunal symbols of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. The colours are incredible and remind us just how highly decorated all medieval churches would once have been.



BHC's other top wall paintings include Hailes (Gloucestershire), Idsworth (Hampshire) and Easby (Yorkshire).

LOST EMPEROR REWRITES BRITISH HISTORY

The discovery of a 5,000 strong hoard of Roman coins at Chalgrove in Oxfordshire, in the Spring of last year, was an interesting but not unusual find. However, now that British Museum conservators have painstakingly completed the separation and cleaning of the coins, its importance to the understanding of a key period of Britain's past has astounded both archaeologists and historians alike.



Amongst numerous common Roman coins, there was found one minted by a completely unknown Roman Emperor named Domitianus. Subsequent investigation has revealed that two very brief and obscure references do exist to this man, but only as a high ranking army officer who became involved in a military uprising (the Historia Augusta) and was afterwards punished for High Treason by the Emperor Aurelian in the early AD 270s (Zosimus). No-one had any idea that Domitianus had declared

himself Emperor, let alone had enough control to initiate coin production.

His rise to power occurred during the period when Britain formed part of the 'Gallic Empire,' consisting largely of modern France and the Rhineland. This area had broken away from central Imperial control after the Emperor had been captured by the King of Persia in AD 260. He was used as a living footstall until his death, when he was stuffed and put on display in a museum! An army officer named Postumus declared himself Emperor of Britain & Gaul and a succession of similar characters followed. It appears that Domitianus was one of these men. His coin is almost identical to those of the odious Gallic Emperor Victorinus, from whom he must have seized power in AD 271, before himself being overthrown by one Tetricus, the Governor of Aquitaine, in the same year. Tetricus is recorded to have clashed with the true Emperor, Aurelian, the recorded punisher of Domitianus.

It is now known that a second coin of Domitianus also exists. Found in the Loire area of France in 1900, it was dismissed as a modern hoax and has only recently been traced after disappearing into the collections of a small museum. The circumstances of the Oxfordshire find make it clear that these coins are no fakes. Experts now wonder how many similar coins have been misidentified and are urging numismatists to re-examine their collections.

See BHC Online's [List of Roman Emperors](#).

BEING LORD OF THE MANOR

When studying British history, an important character who often crops up in our reading is the 'Lord of the Manor'; but who actually were these people, what did they do and what is their relevance today? We were kindly invited to visit Mr. Willie Hartley Russell, Lord of the Manor of Bucklebury in the Royal County of Berkshire, to find out:



Mr. Willie Hartley Russell at Bucklebury House

So, what exactly is a 'Lord of the Manor'?

Lord of the Manor is a feudal title going back to medieval times. Traditionally, the Lord of the Manor was the principal (and sometimes only) landowner in a parish (or manor). In some ways he (or she) was a miniature monarch, in that he (or she) controlled all the land and property on which villagers often derived their living from and hence the feudal system of landlord and tenant arose. The Lord of the Manor was also responsible for administering the manor and the Lord of the Manor's Court dealt with minor matters.

In my case, a large tract of land, known as Bucklebury Common (860 acres), which is both subject to Commoners Rights and is open to the public, clearly increases my visibility in the local community, since I am responsible for the management of this important recreational asset, as my ancestors have been before me. Therefore, the title 'Lord of the Manor' is still used extensively by local residents. In many ways I think people like to preserve traditions that have been passed down over time.

Is this the same as being a Lord?

No, it is quite different although many hereditary Lords (Peers) are also Lords of a Manor (or Manors) reflecting their land ownership. A Peer of the Realm (Lord) sits in the

House of Lords, (although this changed recently when most hereditary peers lost their seats in a Government Reform and therefore now the majority of Peers are Life Peers (i.e. They are appointed for life)). A Peer of the Realm (Lord) is considerably more important than a Lord of the Manor. Heraldically, a Peer can add Supporters to his or her arms, whereas a Lord of a Manor is usually only entitled to a straight forward arms and crest. A Lord of a Manor is only usually concerned with the affairs of his Manor or Parish.

How do you become a Lord of the Manor?

There are basically two routes; either you inherit a title or you may purchase one. I would say that the majority of people inherit their titles although sales of Manor Lordships have been more common over the last 20 years. This is as a result of great estates being broken up. Usually, families follow the rule of primogeniture, a feudal rule whereby the whole estate and manor passes to the eldest surviving son. In my case, I was the second son. The Lord of the Manor title clearly has some monetary value and therefore needs to be valued for probate purposes. The Manorial Society of Great Britain are the experts in this field.

How do you feel about people purchasing the title of Lord of the Manor?

I am fairly relaxed about the idea. It is particularly nice when someone new purchases the principal Manor House and/or Estate and can reunite the title with the land. In any event, my family purchased the manors of Bucklebury and Thatcham from King Henry VIII in 1540, so I suppose one could argue that the practice has lasted for centuries!

Where are you the Lord of the Manor for?

I am Lord of the Manor of Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley and Donnington in the Royal County of Berkshire, and Iffley in Oxfordshire.

You live at Bucklebury House. Do manor lords all live in their manor village these days?

I would say the majority still live in their respective villages but a good proportion do not. Clearly, a Lord of the Manor who lives in his own Manor, owns a good proportion of the land and whose family have been there for generations is going to have a greater influence on local affairs. A non-resident, non-landowning Lord of the Manor will by contrast have very little impact.

I understand that your ancestor, 'Jack O'Newbury' is something of a folk hero in the local area. You are also closely related to Lord Bolingbroke, who tried to return the Jacobites to power, and to David Hartley, who, with his friend Benjamin Franklin, drew up the peace treaty between Britain and the US at the end of the American Revolution. How do you feel about having such distinguished ancestry?



Portrait of David Hartley

I am clearly extremely proud to have several illustrious ancestors. Interestingly, they have all made their contributions to the Estate and House and have left their mark on the place. I find that incredibly powerful. I certainly look upon myself as a 'life tenant' and aim to hand the place on in a better state than when I inherited. The sense of history and tradition is therefore extremely strong and I certainly do not take it for granted. I feel very privileged to be able to continue a tradition.

Manor courts were always an important part of village life in the past. Are these still held? What are they for?

Manor Courts were incredibly important. Here in Bucklebury they were primarily used for administering the Common. One should remember that several hundred people within the village used the Common to supplement their income and depended on the Common for their livelihood. For instance, firewood was collected for fires, wood was used for repairing fences and for repairs to houses. Animals were grazed, bedding (bracken) was harvested for the animals. Allotments were provided for the growing of vegetables etc etc. Householders were often caught trying to 'encroach' the Common (i.e. fence off land adjacent to their homes). This was fiercely contested by other commoners who wanted to protect the Common for the Commoners.

Most Manor Courts were abolished under the 1925 Law of Property Act. The Court Leet and Baron of Bucklebury, although it has no judicial powers, is still allowed to sit as it

was one of a handful of Manorial Courts allowed to hold Courts under the 1977 Justice Act.

The last Court was held in 1969. Interestingly, the Lord of the Manor has no position in his Court. This is delegated to the Steward of the Manor who, in my case, is my solicitor. I suppose it goes back to the ideal of 'fair play'. Up and until 1925 the Court Leet and Baron used to meet monthly in the Bladebone Public House, where a jury of 12 men including two tythingmen decided on the cases brought against local residents. Fines were imposed regularly. The Estate archive has all the Court Books going back many centuries which make fascinating reading. We also have one of the few 'Pounds'....where stray animals were impounded or pigs without rings in their noses were placed.

Some manor lords have the right of 'advowson' - appointing the local rector. Do you have this right and, if so, what does it entail?

My family used to have the right of Advowson for the parish of St Mary Bucklebury, basically appointing the Vicar of the local church. However, my great great aunt, the Lady of the Manor at the beginning of the 20th century, became a Catholic and gave the right of advowson to a friend and another local landowner, as she no longer felt qualified to exercise the right

Do you have any other special rights?

Yes. I have the use of two manorial pews in the Local Church, both located in the Chancel. I only sit in them occasionally (Remembrance Sunday, weddings and funerals) as I am Catholic also, but it is a nice tradition

The other tradition that I have is that I have to pay the Queen a rent of one red rose every year on the feast of the nativity of St John the Baptist (24th June), in respect of holding the Manor of Donnington. I always receive a charming letter from Her Majesty's Private Secretary.

What about obligations?

Clearly as Lord of the Manor I have certain responsibilities with regard to the Common and the parish generally. I try and be of service and help people where possible. I am passionate about preserving our beautiful countryside but at the same time recognising that time moves on.

Apparently a large pipeline has been laid across your land. How was this received by the local residents?

At first there was considerable concern and opposition. However, the gas pipeline is now in and the countryside fully restored to its previous state. It is impossible to detect where the pipeline goes. Environmental agencies and Government have obliged Gas Companies to operate to the highest environmental standards.

In addition, there is an Above Ground Installation (AGI), basically a small gas pumping station. Again this has been built into the side of the hill so that it is almost invisible and the Gas Company have used sympathetic materials and an extensive planting programme which will help further to limit its impact in the countryside. I think local residents have been amazed at the low impact it has made on the environment. Transco, the Gas Company, also contributed to the repair of the Common Pound, referred to above.

I know that you are heavily involved with the Donnington Hospital. How did this come about?

Basically the Lord of the Manor of Donnington is also Patron of Donnington Hospital, an ancient charity founded in 1393. My family, through marriage, became Lords of the Manor of Donnington over 350 years ago and successive generations have been Patrons of the Trust and Trustees. The Donnington Hospital Trust is the 10th oldest almshouse charity in England and the 23rd oldest charity in England. The charity has 50 almshouses for retired people, of good character and slender means. They must also be resident in Berkshire or Oxfordshire. My two brothers are also Trustees.

So how does the hospital function today?

Donnington Hospital is very fortunate to have a considerable endowment, principally land, commercial property and residential property. The income generated from this property portfolio provides the income for the maintenance and upkeep of our 50 almshouses and also provides income for our charitable giving (donations) and Relief in Need. The Trust has 9 Trustees who oversee the running of the Charity. We also have a Trust office which consists of a number of part time staff, a clerk, a Minister (an ancient title of the person responsible for the welfare of residents) and part time secretaries. We also employ two full time wardens and two part time gardeners and a person responsible for buildings maintenance. We have a close link with the Almshouse Association and have regular reviews with the Charity Commission.

How do you manage to balance your priorities with so many different demands on your time?

My principal occupation is as a Director of Merrill Lynch Investment Managers in the City of London. I am responsible for over 40 Institutional and Charity clients. I am therefore working five full days a week doing that. I am Patron of the Donnington Hospital Trust and owner of the Bucklebury Estate, a landed agricultural estate in West Berkshire. I basically manage these activities in the evening or weekend, but am supported by staff on the ground. On the charitable side, I am also on the National Executive Committee of the Almshouse Association. In the past I have also served on the West Berkshire Unitary Authority and Bucklebury Parish Council. I was also Secretary General of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (Knights of Malta) for 5 years. I am

also on various other committees and charities. In short I suppose I am pretty busy and survive on relatively little sleep. I also have a family and three young sons, who clearly take priority a lot of the time.

I understand that you want to raise the profile of your county. Why is this?

The Royal County of Berkshire is very dear to me. I suppose my interest in the County was sparked by my father who was Chairman of Berkshire County Council and later High Sheriff of Berkshire. I was very disappointed when the County boundaries were dramatically changed in 1974 as part of a Local Government reorganisation. Historically, Berkshire used to go right up to the City of Oxford. It now stops at the Ridgeway several miles to the south. Berkshire gained Slough in return for giving up some of the prettiest countryside in the South of England.

The other major factor has been a further Government Reorganisation 6 or 7 years ago which saw the abolition of Berkshire County Council and the creation of 5 or 6 Unitary Authorities. Not only was this short sighted but we lost the overall identity of having a County Council. That is why it has been so much more important to maintain and raise the identity of the County. I was very much involved in getting the six new Unitary Authorities to agree to retain and maintain the County Boundary signs. I have also tried, without success so far, to get the County Arms (conferred on the former County Council) adopted by the Lieutenancy of Berkshire. I am pleased to say that the County still has a Lord Lieutenant, Lieutenancy and a High Sheriff.

Who can help in this campaign and what can be done?

What we are looking to achieve is for Berkshire to remain a recognisable area and to retain its County status. Clearly, this has not been helped by the abolition of the Berkshire County Council. The Royal Berkshire History Website (www.berkshirehistory.com) is an excellent way of keeping the values and traditions of our great County alive and well. After all it is the Royal County of Berkshire and the Sovereign lives in Windsor!

Are there any other important aspects of your life at Bucklebury & Donnington which you would like to share with us?

You may like to look at www.donnington.org to view some of the work the Donnington Hospital Trust undertakes.

Thank you.

See BHC Online for more information on [Jack of Newbury](#), [Viscount Bolingbroke](#) & [Bucklebury House](#).

If you would like to support to the Preservation of the Royal County of Berkshire, please e-mail dford@britannia.com

TRANSATLANTIC CONTROVERSY OVER MEDIEVAL TREASURE

When a court judgement recently obliged the Earl of Macclesfield to move out of Shirburn Castle (Oxon), he put much of his library up for sale at Sotheby's. Amongst the tomes on offer was a magnificent psalter – an illuminated book of prayers – written in the 14th C. & completely unknown to scholars.



The style indicates that the book – now dubbed the 'Macclesfield Psalter' – was produced in East Anglia, probably Norwich. Its illustrations include butt-faced grotesques, naked wild men, wolves dressed as bishops and men, some without pants, pulling dragons' tongues and being chased by giant rays.

Efforts were made by the FitzWilliam Museum in Cambridge to purchase this great British treasure. But, having been turned down for National Lottery funding, their bids fell somewhat short of the £1.7m paid out on behalf of the Getty Museum in California. But many people in the UK feel that such a National Treasure should not be allowed to go abroad. The Government has imposed a temporary export ban on the book and the FitzWilliam has been given the chance to match the sale price.

Historians and celebrities, such as Michael Palin of Monty Python fame, have therefore helped to launch a vast campaign to raise the money needed to keep this important work of art in the UK (donations accepted online at www.artfund.org). The Government's deadline has even been extended. Meanwhile, the Getty, who bought the psalter fair and square, has prudently chosen to say nothing.

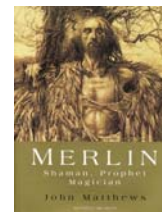


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Contact: Rod Hampton, Director E-Mail: rhampton@britannia.com
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Newsletter designed & produced by [Nash Ford Publishing](http://www.nashfordpublishing.com)
Finchampstead, Berkshire, UK E-Mail: dford@earlybritishkingdoms.com

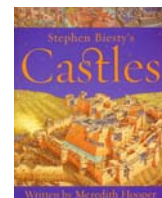
BEST BOOKS



John Matthews' 'Merlin: Shaman, Prophet, Magician' Mitchell Beazley £17.99

John Matthews is one of the most prolific of writers on Arthurian subjects and, having recently been the historical consultant for the King Arthur movie, now presents to us his latest offering concerning Merlin the Magician. It claims to be the first 'fully illustrated' work on the subject and is certainly an excellent overview of this mysterious character. Matthews takes a look at all aspects of Merlins life: as seer, prophet, lover and magician. Particularly interesting is his examination of Merlin's influence on modern fictional characters such as Gandalf and Obi-Wan Kenobi.

[Buy Merlin on Amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)



'Stephen Biesty's Castles' Enchanted Lion Book \$19.95

I found this book in the Children's Section of my local Book Store. It could equally hold its own in the main history area.

This is one of the best books I've ever bought about castles. It has less than fifty pages, but each double page spread is covered by an enormous colour aerial view of a different fortress, with the most intricate details at every angle. Of course, personally I think it is a shame that Mr. Biesty doesn't only cover Britain, but there are still three English Castles and one Welsh one included. The Royal Castle of Windsor is particularly impressive as it is drawn at the time of a Royal Tournament in 1344. There are knights and horses and tents everywhere!

[Buy Stephen Biesty's Castles on Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)